

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 16th February 2025 am
TITLE: "Training for godliness in God's gym" TEXT: 1 Timothy 4 verses 1-16
SERIES: "Guarding the deposit" Pt 14 Scripture references from the ESV

1 Timothy 4:1-16 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

⁶ If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.⁹ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.¹⁰ For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.¹¹ Command and teach these things.¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.¹⁵ Practise these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Imagine you are fighting a war, and you can see a heavily armoured tank approaching. To combat it, you pull out the weapon you have been given. It is a peashooter! It is clear that this will not end well for you. We may not be in a physical battle, but we are very definitely in a spiritual one and we need the right weapons to fight with.

- It is a spiritual battle for godliness

Godliness is not what many of us might think it is. Often, we have the idea that godliness is seen in the life of a person who avoids so-called sinful places, beverages and practices, or perhaps has shut themselves away from the world to lead a monastic

life. We might assume a person who can quote Bible references at the drop of a hat is godly.

Those might all be good things, depending on the motive behind them, but that is not godliness. Here is a definition:

Godliness is a God honouring way of life that comes from a true knowledge of God and his grace in Jesus Christ.

A godly person is one whose life is centred on God, and therefore worships him from the heart, not just with his lips. He lives in joyful obedience to God out of the strength that God gives so that God is glorified.

True godliness has to do with an inner change of our heart by the Spirit of God, so that, loving, worshipping and delighting in God, we rightly fear him and experience him strengthening us by his Spirit to live an obedient life that shows the beauty of God.

True godliness is not something we strive to achieve in our own strength. It is a gift God gives to us through our knowing Christ experientially and believing the gospel. The Bible talks of godliness thus:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, (2 Peter 1:3)

Paul, a servant^[a] of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, (Titus 1:1)

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)

Godliness is a life centred on Christ,

that obeys Christ in the strength that Christ gives so that Christ is glorified

The tank from the initial illustration represents our human flesh, waging war against us, as it tempts us to act in sinful ways, making sin feel pleasurable. It traps us in sinful habits, leading us to do things that we regret because we know it grieves God.

The rules and regulations we set up relating to what we consider to be sinful places, forbidden foods and drink are like the peashooter we are trying to use as a weapon against the tank. They will not lead us to godliness. No matter how much others may

admire us for how our lives look to them, and no matter how well we may think we are doing because we abide by the rules, true godliness will never be achieved that way. Instead, we will achieve a life of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness that will not honour Christ or deepen our relationship with him.

- Living life by rules and regulations will lead us away from Christ

Many churches today are spiritually dead because they do not know and love Jesus, and there is no work of the Spirit there. They have replaced Christ-centred relational obedience with rules and regulations. They might appear godly, but it is not the true godliness of which the Bible speaks and that Christ forms in us.

- Individual Christians can suffer the same issue when they fail to deepen their relationship with Christ and fall into legalism in order to keep up an appearance of godliness.

We do not fight flesh tanks with peashooter regulations.

We have seen that we need spiritual discernment (**vv1-5**) above. We also need to follow good servants of Jesus Christ, and Paul shows us what they are like (**vv4-16**). The good servant of Jesus Christ is someone who shows God to be creator and redeemer, teaches the gospel of Christ and lives a life of obedience in the strength that Christ gives.

What is the foundation of the life of a good servant? It lies in true godliness, and we need to see the importance of godliness and how to achieve it.

1. The importance of true godliness. This is a recurring theme of the letter to Timothy, and Paul shows that it has far more value than physical fitness (**v8**). To be physically fit, we eat a healthy diet and take exercise, but ultimately our bodies will be laid to rest in a grave and decay. However, godliness holds promise for both this life and the life to come, and Paul confirms the truth of this (**v9**).

- When we pursue godliness (**v10**), thus pursuing God himself, it will not lead to disappointment either in this life or the life to come.

Through this godly life, we experience his presence with us now and in eternity. If you are not enjoying God's presence, together with his peace, his love, his strength and his hope for the future, perhaps you have ceased to pursue godliness.

- In the pursuit of the good physical things that God gives, of physical fitness or seeking acceptance with God through your own righteous deeds, have you neglected the pursuit of true godliness and of God himself?

We need to hear again the trustworthy saying of **v8**.

Without true godliness, we cut ourselves off from the life for which we were created:

The life of knowing and enjoying God.

2. How do we achieve true godliness? As with physical fitness, we need the right diet and the right discipline.

a) We achieve godliness through the right diet (v6)

The word trained can be translated as nourished. What we feed our minds with will affect our godliness and it is certainly true that if you feed your mind on the diet of godlessness found on TV, social media and other places, you will not live a life of godliness.

However, what Paul has in mind is something far more subtle. He is talking about a spiritual junk food that comes from deceitful spirits and is the teaching of demons. It is the teaching that says you can achieve godliness through obeying rules and regulations, and denying yourself

legitimate pleasures. This is the legalism and asceticism already highlighted, which lead us to believe that we can destroy the flesh tanks with peashooter regulations.

If we nourish our minds with Christianised teaching promoting a kind of Christian lifestyle that is divorced from the power of the gospel of Christ, we will never achieve true godliness. We will never have a heart that is transformed by the grace and power of Christ. No matter what other people may think of us, we are not pleasing God.

We are to avoid the spiritual junk food offered to us by false teachers (**v7**) and instead nourish ourselves on the gospel (**v6**). It is the message declared by the apostles:

Jesus Christ lived, died, and was resurrected.

He ascended back to heaven for our justification.

- My acceptance with a holy God is not based on how well I am performing as I keep the rules.
- My acceptance with a holy God is based solely on Jesus and all he has accomplished.

I am declared righteous in God's sight because Jesus Christ lived a righteous life on my behalf, died to atone for my sins and was raised for my justification. This justification is received by faith alone in Christ alone. It is a gift of grace from God and it is good news for us that it is not found in keeping rules and regulations, because we can never do that perfectly.

- The sinner who trusts in Christ is declared righteous by God and that standing never changes, no matter how well or badly they perform.

When we nourish our souls with this truth, we begin to love and delight in God, resulting in a life of radical obedience to Christ. The grace of God achieves what rules and regulations never can.

This is true godliness.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, (Titus 2:11-12)

- b) We achieve godliness through the right discipline. (v7).** Train is the Greek word gymnaze, from which we get gymnasium, and it has the connotation of discipline.

We are to forsake the junk food of legalism and asceticism and we are to discipline ourselves for godliness. We need to do those things that lead us to fellowship with Christ and cause us to enjoy him and experience his presence and transforming grace in our lives.

We need to make use of the habits of grace:

- The discipline of reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, meeting with God's people to praise him, taking the Lord's supper, and being baptised.

This might sound like the very legalism that we are to avoid but the difference lies in the motivation and the source of strength.

- If you work through the habits of grace to earn favour with God, then you have fallen into self righteousness.
- If you work through the habits of grace in your own strength, then you have fallen into self sufficiency.

The peashooters of legalism and asceticism rob Christ of his glory and leave us vulnerable to sin, Satan and the flesh.

In contrast, consider what a different life you would live when you are so overwhelmed by Christ's love that you delight to spend time listening and speaking to him, and you are so aware of your own inadequacy that you come to Christ for grace and strength to live out his commands.

If you undertake any of the habits of grace with a heart full of self righteousness and self sufficiency, then you will not achieve true godliness. All you will do is build up condemnation for yourself on the day of judgment.

If you come with a humble heart of dependence on Christ and joy in him, you will find yourself:

- Being drawn away from sin and closer to Christ
- Hating the sin that nailed Christ to the cross and loving Christ who gave his life for you
- Becoming less judgmental of others and more willing to serve them

Legalism is the polar opposite of godliness.

Sometimes it can make you appear to be very godly but in fact, Christ is absent from all your religious practice. You are living in a self righteous and self-sufficient way that brings glory to you. There is no work of the Spirit to lead you into a vibrant relationship with Jesus that has Christ at the centre.

- When we are nourishing our souls on the gospel through the habits of grace, we come to see Christ, experience his love, and recognise our helplessness without him.

We come to delight in Christ and depend on Christ.

We come to experience his transforming grace to create in us the godliness that glorifies Christ and displays Christ.